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~ High Gas = Telework?! ~ People Are Talking! ~ Icahn Blasts Yahoo!
~ Spyware Bill Lacking! ~ U.S. Hacker Sentenced! ~ U.S. Privacy Laws!
~ Snow Leopard Previewed ~ China Denies Hacking! ~ World's Fastest PC!

~ New Firefox Next Week! ~ Four Nations Fight MS! ~ Amazon Fails Again!

-* DiCaprio Set To Play Bushnell *-
-* Russian Prez Wants Cyrillic Domain! *-
-* Yahoo-Microsoft Talks Fail, Google On Again *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Wow, when we get a heat wave, we get a heat wave!! Four consecutive days of 90-plus degrees of sweltering heat. And naturally, there was plenty of humidity to go along with it! And the rest of the week we saw temperatures in the 80's - what a cold snap! I'm certainly grateful for air conditioning and swimming pools!

Well, I didn't do much outdoor work this past week - too darn hot! And as a result, some of my plants waiting to get in the ground didn't fare too well. Sure, everything got watered, but apparently not enough to keep up with the heat. We'll see if the few that aren't well come back. Almost everything has been planted - a couple more flats of annuals to go. Then I have to paint and put up some new planters for the remaining few plants. I think next year I'm going to put in a lot of perennials so I don't have to go through this every year! Hmmm, maybe I'll start putting some in sooner!

And before I forget, don't you forget your fathers this weekend! We all tend to remember mothers on Mothers Day, but somehow forget our dads on Fathers Day. My wife and I will be heading "down Maine" to visit my father this weekend. Should be a good time; we haven't seen him in some time now. Don't forget!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Mother Nature gave us a taste of summer here in the northeast this past week. Temperatures have been in the mid 90's for four days, and the humidity was annoyingly high for several of them. Thank goodness for air conditioning, huh?

I don't have a lot to talk about this week, except that a good family friend passed away the other day. He was my brother's father-in-law.

Ted was a good guy, and I always enjoyed getting together with him at birthday parties for his grand children/my niece and nephew.

Ted was one of those guys who was, at least every time I'd seen him, happy, personable and fun-loving.

At 79 years old, he was your typical hard workin' guy who delighted in watching his children and grandchildren grow and become 'people' in their own right.

Through all the trials and tribulations that come with age, Ted dealt with whatever came his way with the same good natured attitude. While the phrase 'slow and steady' might be a little misleading (there was really nothing slow about Ted), 'steady' seems to be a good word to fit him. I guess 'easy going' would be the best way to describe him. Show me a man today who can deal with having NINE children and still maintain a sense of normalcy, and I'll show you Ted's successor. I'm not holding my breath though. He'll be sorely missed, and my condolences go out to his wife of 58 years, Ruth.

On a different note, the PHOENIX Mars probe is now sitting on the ground in the Martian arctic, waiting to analyze a sample of dirt to see what's in the stuff. The major snafu so far seems to have been that they couldn't get the darned stuff to go through a screen that was designed to keep large clumps of it from blocking the entrance to the oven that's going to cook the heck out of it. While many will simply throw their hands up and point to this as "another NASA screw-up", the fact is that we can learn something even from this problem (which was resolved the other day when the dirt finally made it through the screen and into the oven). The best science seems to happen not when there are good answers, but when there are good questions. Well, amigo, we've got some pretty good ones now: Why didn't the dirt make it through the 'strainer' before? Why DID it finally make it through? Was there frozen water or carbon dioxide ice or frost holding the grains of sand together? Was there an electrostatic charge holding it in place? We don't know... yet.

It strikes me that the interest in Mars landings isn't what it once was. I vaguely remember when Mariner flew past Mars and gave us our first real look at the planet. Actually, I remember studying it in school several years after the fact, but the effect is the same. I remember my father just shaking his head at the news that there were indeed no oceans or 'canals' on Mars, and that it looked like a cold, dead wasteland, and mumbling about money wasted. I remember my science teacher being excited about the fact that the human exploration of Mars "couldn't be far off".

I wonder what Mr. Wysocki would think now, after more than 4 decades, about how far we've come. True, we haven't sent men to Mars, and we're not that much closer to doing so now than we were then, but we've learned so much more than even the most optimistic scientist would have hoped for back when Mariner 4 took those first pictures.

We now know that Mars is dry, but has large amounts of water ice buried just beneath the surface in many if not most places, we've learned that the polar caps are not just frozen carbon dioxide (dry ice to you and me) as once thought, but a combination of CO2 and frozen water. We've learned that it's a planet of superlatives and extremes: It has the highest volcano/mountain and the longest and deepest valley or canyon in the solar system, that there's about a hundred degree difference

between the warmest and coldest temperatures (Earth has about a 250 degree difference between warmest and coldest temps), and that huge dust storms can cover the entire planet from time to time. It may be dry, dusty, almost airless and bathed in ultraviolet radiation, but it's sure not boring.

Will we ever send people to Mars? I don't know. It seems that we lose interest in things so quickly today. Heck, we've even lost interest in finding out why we've lost interest. I hope that we'll work toward sending astronauts to Mars, but I'm afraid that it'll take something huge, like the discovery of life on Mars or some sort of unimaginable catastrophe here on our home planet to give us the kick in the pants that we need. Heck, 30 years ago I would have bet you a week's pay that we'd have been there by now.

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info available from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Guillaume Tello asks about LAN networking particulars:

"Does anyone know the max speed of the LAN ports on the TT and Mega STE? Any network software made?"

Jo Even Skarstein tells Guillaume:

"230k baud for the LAN ports.

Nothing specific for the LAN-ports for software as far as I know. They're just ordinary serial-ports (RS-422 I think), so you can run TCP/IP over SLIP or PPP like on the normal serial port."

Guillaume hunts around and tells Jo Even:

"I have found DUETLANT for the TT, I can't get it to run...

I have on both TTs:

- DUETLANT.PRG
- then DUETCONF.PRG & DUETCON.INF in the auto folder

DUETCONF.INF has:

```
SPEED 19200 (not too ambitious)
TIMEOUT 5 (cool, no hurry)
STATE 0 (read only)
```

And one of them has this line:

DRIVE N F (locally virtual drive N will be connected to distant existing drive F)

The boot is Ok, then when I try to reach drive N, 5 seconds after I get a message saying that data may be corrupted on drive N. But it exists!"

'ggnkua' tells Guillaume:

"I found the program on
<http://www.umich.edu/~archive/atari/Network/Local/>
and I'll give it a go when I get home - at work right now. Do I need a
special cable for the lan port? (I can't remember its shape at the
moment)."

Guillaume tells ggnuka:

"That's where I got it!

I used the cable found between a MacIIsi and its printer. Is it the good
one? Don't know...

Well if you can make a network even with another serial port (I have a
Modem 1 connection) with Duet, I'd like to know your settings.

Does SERIAL.CPX interfere? I tried with and without it, no change..."

Mark Goossens jumps in and tells Guillaume:

"Today, I tried DUET also, with 3 computers.

- between TT <-> MSTe 1
- between TT <-> MSTe 2
- between MSTe 2 <-> MSTe 1

Without success.

I used two different cables. I disabled my normal AUTO folder, and
booted the machine with minimum requirement.

I got drive N (mapped to drive C on both machines), but couldn't open
the folder. Maybe someone has had more luck? In the near future, I'll
try it again with sting and bnet."

Mark comes back and posts:

"I've connected etherneec's to my falcons (2x) , and netusbee on my TT.
Under mint, I use mintnet and bnet for mint. Under magic, I use sting
and bnet for sting. With bnet I've graphically access to the other
computer. The other computers are located on a 'p'-drive.

I can copy over the network, just by drag and drop, from one to
another window. Bnet is for me a great piece of software. I like it a
lot. Unhappily, it don't work with samba drives. For that I use
Sharity-light (under mint, or under magic).

You must always use the command line for establishing a network
connection. Writing a startup script would be a good idea. [Grin]"

Alyre Chiasson asks about the DIP switches for the MegaSTE's hard drive
controller:

"With the acquisition of a new floppy drive I decided to try and get my
Mega Ste up and running. I was wondering what the jumper settings

should be on the mother board connector for the Atari hard disk controller when the controller is removed? Are there any other dip switches on the mother board that must be flipped when the controller is removed?. I want to use my ICD Link II in its place. All of this was because I thought the controller might have been at the origin of some of my problems with getting the hard disk to work properly. However, when I opened the case a red resistor pack (at least that's what I am calling it) fell out. It has 8 pins with a shiny red housing that covers them across the top. There are other similar ones on the mother board. The question is did it fall out of the mother board from somewhere or was it a leftover during fabrication? Are there any schematics of the Mega Ste that might tell me where it might have come from or where they should be? Google turned up some references but nothing concrete. It could be at the origin of all my problems. The last series of numbers on the resistor are 311J213."

'ppera' tells Alyre:

"Mega STE schematics can be downloaded here:
<http://dev-docs.atariforge.org/>

There you may find purposes of DIP Switches (it's called so) in the machine.

I know only from memory that switch pos 7 is for activating high density floppy mode - in case that you replaced your original one (for instance EPSON SMD 380 was in mine, SD) with some HD floppy."

Jo Even Skarstein replies:

"If I remember correctly, it only activates HD-mode in the desktop floppy formatter. HD-mode is handled automatically."

ppera tells Jo Even:

"That's not correct. With switch 7 at original pos. my machine couldn't read HD floppies. When I moved it, then it started to read HD, and formatting in HD as option appeared too. Of course that HD is handled automatically, otherwise it wouldn't read DD floppies. Under activating I meant not momentaly mode, but support for HD mode..."

Mark Bedingfield tells ppera:

"I've had 3 MegaSTE's and they all behaved the same. I could format 1.44's with the switch off, but not from the desktop menu. The switch enables a cookie for TOS. It flags the drive basically. There is an auto folder cookie app that simulates the same thing for non MegaSTE/TT/Falcon owners.

What version of TOS were you using? I have only really tried with 2.06. I had a 2.05 Mega but upgraded it before I even used it. Also installed TOS 2.06 rom's in STE's and STFM's as well as a couple of HDD upgrades. Always the same. Step rate was really the only issue."

Jo Even sides with Mark:

"My Mega STE behaved exactly like yours. It was a rather early MSTe with a standard DD floppy. When the floppy died I replaced it with a Sony HD-drive. It worked fine without touching the dip-switch at all."

Ppera checks his hardware and tells Jo Even and Mark:

"Well, I checked it again yesterday... (I don't use much floppies on it, there is hard disk of course). It worked not at all with HD floppies. So, I replaced drive and it worked. Then I checked problematic floppy (TEAC) and saw that HD sensor is little moved, and diskette with HD hole still pushes it down. I bend it with small screwdriver, so it is now OK.

And yes, switch pos 7 is only for extra format option.

It looks that when I put in TEAC (about year ago) it just had similar HD detection problem, and after moving DIP switch 7 it just happened that HD sensor switch worked good...

I have TOS 2.06 . It is some early Mega STE, was 2.05 in, but I replaced it immediately.

Yeah, step rate is solved very primitive, and with DD floppies we have horrible sounds - especially TEAC has loud one.

I patched TOS 2.06 earlier, and set there step rates to 3 mS, used some little proggies or bootsector of floppies to set 6 mS for HD disks. It was for 520ST with added simple circuit for supporting HD floppies. Of course, it offered not HD format from Desktop, because was no port and microswitches.

By the way. I solved step rate problem in STE with special HW adapter - it switches back FDC clock to 8MHz while stepping - done with monostable. So, no SW fixing is required."

Jo Even asks Ppera:

"Does your MSTe have a 1772-02-02 or an Ajax floppy controller? My had a 02-02 and HD did work fine. I'm just curious whether the Ajax solves the step-rate-problem more elegantly than the 1772."

Ppera replies:

"It has Ajax. But that chip is nothing better considering step rate. It is just guaranteed good for HD floppies and maybe for ED ones (never saw such). In other words, it can reliably work at 16 MHz or even 32 MHz (for ED). But dumb FDC never knows with what MHz is clocked, so step rate should be solved by OS. Atari could solve it with little effort - just setting step rate according to what floppy is inserted and/or at what clock FDC runs. Maybe it would require additional bit on some port, don't know."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section      - DiCaprio To Play Bushnell!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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# Leonardo DiCaprio Lined Up To Play Video Game Mogul

Leonardo DiCaprio is set to play pioneering video game entrepreneur Nolan Bushnell in a biopic about the Atari co-founder's life, it was reported Monday.

Daily Variety said screen heart-throb DiCaprio had been attached to produce as well as star in the film about Bushnell, one of the founding fathers of the video game industry.

Atari - which created the world's first successful video game "Pong" - was estimated to be worth more than 2 billion dollars by 1982 but was later broken up following the US video game crash of 1984.

DiCaprio, 33, will next appear in two dramas, the spy thriller "House of Lies" and "Revolutionary Road."

## Video Game Addicts Are Not Shy Nerds

Playing video games for hours on end may be bad for your health, but, according to an Australian study, it doesn't mean you are a lonely nerd and won't damage your social skills.

The study, by Australian psychology graduate Daniel Loton, found that 15 percent of 621 adult respondents to an online survey were identified as "problem gamers" who spend more than 50 hours a week playing games.

But only one percent of those gamers appeared to have poor social skills, specifically shyness, Loton said, contradicting the stereotype that video game fans tend to be lonely, geeky, and addicted to gaming because they are unable to socialize.

"Our findings strongly suggest that gaming doesn't cause social problems, and social problems are not driving people to gaming," Loton,



from Victoria University, told Reuters.

"What is important to note is that even problem gamers did not exhibit significant signs of poor social skills or low self-esteem."

Loton said the characteristics that might define a problem gamer include an intrusive preoccupation with gaming - where the amount of time spent playing is affecting work, sleep, and close relationships - and an inability to stop playing.

Problem gamers were more likely to be involved in Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) such as the genre classic "Ultima Online" or "World of Warcraft," which has some 10 million subscribers worldwide, the research found.

Loton, who admitted that he has always played video games, spent the last two years conducting the study, which was based on mainly Australian and mainly male respondents.

His questionnaire included scales to measure social skills, self-esteem and determine "problematic" and "dependence forming" play.

"My analysis showed only tiny relationships, that is less than 5 percent of variation in problem play scores, was explained by social skills," he said.

The findings come after widely reported statements made last year by the American Medical Association (AMA), which labeled MMORPG gamers as "somewhat marginalized socially, perhaps experiencing high levels of emotional loneliness and/or difficulty with real life social interactions."

Citing concerns of video game overuse, the AMA is likely to consider adding "video game addiction" to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders at its 2012 review.

But Loton said calling excessive gaming an addiction may be taking it a step too far.

"There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence about gaming addiction. Online forums abound with tales of people who can't get off the computer," he said.

"But from a clinical point of view, an addiction is a mental illness with very serious consequences. In this context, we need to ask whether gaming is responsible for causing people's lives to fall apart in the same way we see with gambling, alcohol or drug addiction."

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## Icahn Blasts Yahoo Again

Billionaire investor Carl Icahn continued his epistolary shouting match with Yahoo Chairman Roy Bostock on Monday with a letter in which he urges Bostock to justify his director compensation by releasing his time sheets and accuses him of purposefully not answering questions.

What's clear from the tone and frequency of Icahn's letters is that he seems more and more convinced that, as a Yahoo investor, he needs to push his slate of candidates to unseat the company's directors at the next shareholder meeting in August and, he hopes, bring Microsoft back to the negotiating table.

The focus of the latest angry exchange of letters, which started last week, is Yahoo's adoption of an employee severance plan that both Icahn and Yahoo shareholders suing the company allege was implemented to sabotage Microsoft's attempt to acquire Yahoo. Bostock and Yahoo's top executives maintain that the severance plan was necessary in order to retain employees in light of the uncertainty created by Microsoft's pursuit of Yahoo, which officially ended after three months in early May.

"I cannot understand why the Yahoo board feels so strongly about its 'poison pill' severance plan and why it continues to refuse to rescind it. How can you continue to repeat that your severance plan is in the best interests of shareholders and employees?" Icahn wrote in Monday's letter.

Yahoo didn't immediately respond to a request for comment, but on Friday issued a brief statement saying that Icahn, in his previous missive, had inaccurately interpreted the "retention" plan and that his suggestions that the plan be canceled would have a "destabilizing impact" on the company. Yahoo also accused Icahn of having "no credible plan to operate" the company.

The brevity and content of Yahoo's statement on Friday clearly irked Icahn, who ripped into Bostock on Monday.

"In your press release from Friday, you stated again that I do not have a credible plan for Yahoo. Did you even bother to read my letter, which went into great detail on what measures I would ask the new board to take? Ironically, while you keep inquiring about my plans, it is interesting to note that Yahoo's board has been busy reaping great compensation benefits. Indeed, you made approximately \$10,000 per week last year-- not bad for a board member. I believe most of your shareholders would be interested in seeing your time sheets &#8211; especially in light of the fact that, in my estimation, most of your so-called 'plans' over the last few years have been failures," Icahn wrote.

Icahn also reiterates his call for removing Yahoo cofounder Jerry Yang as CEO and returning his "Chief Yahoo" title, so that the company can hire "a talented and experienced" replacement, offering Google CEO Eric Schmidt as a model.

On Monday of last week, the partially censored complaint in a class-action shareholder lawsuit against Yahoo was released in its unedited form following the judge's decision.

That complaint, filed in Delaware Chancery Court in February on behalf

of shareholders the Police & Fire Retirement System and General Retirement System of Detroit, is full of angry allegations, copies of internal Yahoo documents and accounts of what plaintiffs characterize as Yahoo's bad-faith maneuvers toward Microsoft.

Specifically, the document goes into great detail about the crafting of the severance plan to support the plaintiffs' allegations that the plan was put in place solely as a "poison pill" technique to drive Microsoft away. After reading the unedited complaint, Icahn fired off his first letter last Wednesday to Bostock.

Microsoft announced its unsolicited offer to buy Yahoo on Feb. 1-- a US\$44.6 billion cash-and-stock deal that offered shareholders a 62 percent premium over Yahoo's stock price the day before. Yahoo's board rejected that offer, saying it undervalued the company, and Microsoft later increased it to \$47.5 billion, but Microsoft eventually walked away from the negotiations on May 3 after the two sides failed to agree on a price.

After Microsoft withdrew its offer, several large Yahoo institutional investors publicly criticized Yang and the board for, in their view, not negotiating in good faith and failing to look out for shareholders' best interests.

Yang and other Yahoo executives responded by saying that they were open to negotiating further but that Microsoft unexpectedly walked away without ever putting its last offer in writing.

Then Icahn got into the picture, acquiring a significant amount of Yahoo stock and readying his proxy fight in order to reignite merger negotiations.

However, Microsoft officials have indicated that the company isn't interested in buying all of Yahoo anymore.

Microsoft did acknowledge on May 18 that it has approached Yahoo with a proposal to enter into a more limited partnership or deal, which many observers believe likely involves Yahoo's search advertising business.

#### Yahoo-Microsoft Talks Fail, Google Deal Expected

Yahoo Inc and Microsoft Corp have failed to agree on a partnership or merger, the companies said on Thursday, sending Yahoo shares down 13 percent.

Instead, Yahoo is close to a search advertising deal with Google Inc and an announcement could come later in the day, sources familiar with the matter said.

The software maker had sought a deal with Yahoo for more than a year. By early May, Microsoft had offered up to \$47.5 billion to buy the Internet company.

Microsoft hoped an acquisition would accelerate its ability to capitalize on Internet advertising growth and better compete with Google, which is increasingly fighting for the same audience of Internet users.

"It was pretty clear it was going to be one or the other. Yahoo wasn't going to do a deal with Google and then partner with Microsoft," Global Crown Capital analyst Martin Pyykkonen said.

Yahoo said on Thursday that Microsoft had made it clear in a meeting on June 8 that it was no longer interested in buying the company outright, even at the price of \$33 per share Microsoft had most recently proposed.

That may not appease Yahoo shareholders, including billionaire Carl Icahn, who have been pressuring Yahoo to reach a deal with Microsoft. Icahn has called for Chief Executive Jerry Yang to be ousted.

Microsoft said it was not interested in "rebidding" for all of Yahoo, sending its shares up more than 4 percent as investors showed relief that the company would not be paying too high a price for a deal they considered risky.

On Thursday, Yahoo said that an alternative Microsoft proposal to buy only its search business did not fit into Yahoo's plan to grow search and display advertising.

Microsoft said in a statement that its alternative offer was still open for discussion. It said that its most recent discussion with Yahoo for a partial deal would have valued Yahoo at more than \$33 per share.

Analysts said they did not expect that Yahoo and Microsoft would try another round of negotiations based on their statements.

"It certainly seems to be the end," said Derek Brown, an analyst at Cantor Fitzgerald. "In their most recent discussions, they were talking about totally separate visions of both a deal and the future."

Microsoft is expected to soon be on the prowl for other acquisition targets since it has not given up its goal for online advertising.

"Microsoft will keep trying," said Morningstar analyst Toan Tran. "Yahoo is one of most popular sites on the Web and there is no one else with as much traffic. AOL may be one option and it may not be as expensive."

Icahn, who has waged a proxy battle to remove Yahoo's board at its August 1 annual meeting, had urged Yahoo to secure a higher price from Microsoft. Icahn has said a partnership with Google should only be a second choice.

Icahn could not be reached for comment.

Yahoo shares sank as low as \$22.50 on news of the talks failing and the potential Google deal. It was their lowest level since January 31, the day before Microsoft announced its offer for the company.

Yahoo shares closed down \$2.63 at \$23.52. Google shares finished up \$7.75 at \$552.95, and Microsoft closed up \$1.12 at \$28.24.

Apple Previews Its Next Mac OS 'Snow Leopard'

Apple on Monday offered a preview of "Snow Leopard," the next major

version of its Mac OS X operating system.

Snow Leopard, which presumably will be designated Mac OS X 10.6 when released in about a year, will focus more on speed and stability than new features. It will be optimized for multicore processors and will be designed to facilitate future Mac platform innovation.

"We have delivered more than a thousand new features to OS X in just seven years and Snow Leopard lays the foundation for thousands more," said Bertrand Serlet, Apple's senior VP of software engineering, in a statement. "In our continued effort to deliver the best user experience, we hit the pause button on new features to focus on perfecting the world's most advanced operating system."

The forthcoming operating system will lift the theoretical system memory limit to 16 TB. Mac OS X, a 64-bit operating system, supports addressing up to 4 TB of physical memory today. Current Mac Pro models can accommodate up to 32 TB of RAM.

Snow Leopard will include a new technology called "Grand Central" to help developers write applications that take full advantage of multicore processing. It also will extend support for what Apple is calling Open Computing Language, which is designed to help programmers take advantage of graphics processing units for general performance gains.

In addition, Snow Leopard will include QuickTime X, a revised and optimized version of Apple's media technology; native support for Microsoft Exchange; and an implementation of JavaScript that helps applications like Apple's Safari Web browser run 53% faster.

#### Google Says It Would Support U.S. Privacy Law

Google Inc has told a senior Republican lawmaker concerned about privacy that the Internet search and advertising company supports a federal privacy law.

Privacy advocates object to the amount of information that Google, Yahoo (YHOO.O) and other online companies collect about users. Google, in particular, has been under pressure to post a link on its home page to its privacy policy.

Texas Rep. Joe Barton, the senior Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, wrote to Google in May asking for details about the search engine's privacy practices since it acquired competitor DoubleClick.

Google told Barton in a letter dated June 6 that it would support creation of a federal Internet privacy law. A copy of the letter was obtained by Reuters on Tuesday.

"Google supports the adoption of a comprehensive federal privacy law that would accomplish several goals such as building consumer trust and protections; creating a uniform framework for privacy, which would create consistent levels of privacy from one jurisdiction to another; and putting penalties in place to punish and dissuade bad actors," the letter said. It was signed by Alan Davidson, Google's chief lobbyist.

Google's Chief Executive Eric Schmidt and Barton met last November, and two of Barton's aides went to Google headquarters in Mountain View, California in December to discuss privacy.

Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, was skeptical of Google's endorsement of a federal privacy law. Rotenberg said that when companies push for a "comprehensive" law, they often want something that would preempt more stringent state laws.

"We do not want the states to have their hands tied," he said Rotenberg, citing California and New York as examples of states with tough privacy laws.

### Spyware Legislation Needs More Work

A bill before the U.S. Senate targeted at spyware needs some fine-tuning, with part of it seemingly allowing broadband providers and computer software and hardware vendors to scan users' computers without authorization, a couple of spyware experts said.

The Counter Spy Act, introduced last June, would allow broadband providers, computer hardware and software vendors, financial institutions and other businesses to detect and prevent the unauthorized use of software for fraudulent or other illegal activities, said Arthur Butler, a lawyer for advocacy group Americans for Fair Electronic Commerce Transactions. The bill says it would not prevent such scans.

"We think this language is overly broad and could protect activities which could be harmful to computer users," Butler told the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. "It would, in effect, allow a software vendor to truly monitor everything that's on a user's computer, essentially setting [vendors] up as an ad hoc police force."

Another portion of the same section of the bill, aimed at limiting antispyware software vendors and other tech companies from legal liability, would protect antispyware vendors and ISPs (Internet service providers) from legal liability when they protect users from "objectionable content." But without some accountability for antispyware vendors and ISPs, Web sites could have little recourse to refute being labeled as objectionable content, said Jerry Cerasale, senior vice president of government affairs for the Direct Marketing Association (DMA).

Some legitimate DMA members have been targeted by antispyware vendors, and in some cases, the two sides have been able to work out a compromise, he said. But in other cases, the software vendors haven't responded to concerns, and the bill could make it harder to work out issues, Cerasale said.

"'Objectionable software' is a subjective term, and we can disagree on it," Cerasale said.

However, witnesses at the hearing praised the general direction of the bill. The legislation, sponsored by Senator Mark Pryor, an Arkansas Democrat, could allow the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to seek additional civil penalties against spyware distributors, and it defines several activities as illegal, including creating zombie computers,

hijacking Internet access, launching denial-of-service attacks and delivering endless loops of pop-up ads.

The U.S. House of Representatives passed two antispyware bills in 2007, but the Senate has failed to act on spyware legislation during this session.

"Spyware and harmful adware are a critical threat to our online security and privacy," said Vincent Weafer, vice president of security response at Symantec. "It is wrong, and it must be stopped."

But Weafer and other witnesses also urged senators to stay away from getting too specific about what constitutes spyware. The bill doesn't specifically target programs that collect computer users' Web surfing histories, but some people may consider that a form of spyware, said Benjamin Edelman, a professor at Harvard Business School who studies spyware.

"Practices change quickly, and at our peril do we make a list of practices that ought to be prohibited because, the next day, there will be more practices that we didn't think of," Edelman said.

#### China Denies Hacking into US Computers

China denied accusations by two U.S. lawmakers that it hacked into congressional computers, saying Thursday that as a developing country it wasn't capable of sophisticated cybercrime.

"Is there any evidence? ... Do we have such advanced technology? Even I don't believe it," Foreign Ministry spokesman Qin Gang told a regularly scheduled news conference.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., and New Jersey Rep. Chris Smith, a senior Republican on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said Wednesday that their office computers were hacked into by people working from China. Both lawmakers, longtime critics of China's human rights record, said the compromised computers had information regarding political dissidents.

Wolf said four of his computers were compromised beginning in 2006. Smith said two of the computers at his global human rights subcommittee were attacked in December 2006 and March 2007.

China has a thriving information technology industry and claims to have 221 million Internet users - equal to the U.S. as the most in the world.

Qin repeated previous denials that the government sponsors computer attacks overseas and said China also was a victim of cybercrime.

"I'd like to urge some people in the U.S. not to be paranoid," Qin said. "They should do more to contribute to mutual understanding, trust and friendship between the U.S. and China."

The lawmakers' allegations came as U.S. officials were investigating whether Chinese officials had secretly copied the contents of a government laptop during a visit to China last December by U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez and used the information to try to hack into Commerce Department computers.

China has also denied that it was involved in that incident, calling the charges groundless.

The Pentagon acknowledged last month at a closed House Intelligence committee meeting that its vast computer network is scanned or attacked by outsiders more than 300 million times each day.

Wolf said the FBI had told him that computers of other House members and at least one House committee had been accessed by sources working from inside China.

The FBI and the White House have declined to comment. The Bush administration has been increasingly reluctant to publicly discuss or acknowledge cyber attacks, especially ones traced to China.

The allegations are the latest in a series of cybersecurity problems blamed on China. Reports last year cited officials in Germany, the United States and Britain as saying government and military networks had been broken into by hackers backed by the Chinese military.

#### US Hacker Gets 41 Months for Running Rogue Botnet

A U.S. hacker who hooked up a botnet within Newell Rubbermaid's corporate network was sentenced to 41 months in prison on Wednesday, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Robert Matthew Bentley, of Panama City, Florida, must also pay US\$65,000 restitution. He was sentenced in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida.

Bentley could have received a 10-year sentence. He pleaded guilty to charges of computer fraud and conspiracy to commit computer fraud for using the botnet to install advertising software on PCs located throughout Europe without permission.

Newell Rubbermaid, which makes products such as Sharpie markers and plastic food-storage containers, reported their European computer network had been hacked around December 2006. At least one other European-based company also complained.

Bentley's indictment was enabled by investigations conducted by several law enforcement agencies worldwide, including London's Metropolitan Police Computer Crime Unit, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Finland National Bureau of Investigation and other local U.S. agencies.

Others who helped Bentley are still under investigation, the department said. Bentley received a commission from a company called DollarRevenue for every installation of the advertising software.

Ad software can be very difficult to remove and trigger unwanted pop-ups. Many hackers have become astute at installing the software through surreptitious means, such as exploiting software vulnerabilities in a PC's operating system or Web browser.

In December 2007, DollarRevenue was fined £1 million (US\$1.54



million) in the Netherlands, one of the largest fines ever levied in Europe against a company over adware. That investigation found that hackers were paid E0.15 each for installation of DollarRevenue software on computers in Europe and \$0.25 for PCs in the U.S.

#### Four Nations Fight Microsoft Document-Format Standard

Four developing countries have appealed against the adoption of Microsoft's Office Open XML document format as an international standard, the International Organisation for Standardisation said on Monday.

ISO said in a statement the national standards bodies of Brazil, India, South Africa and Venezuela had appealed against the positive outcome of a vote it held in March after a controversial fast-track ratification process.

It gave no details of the substance of the appeals. At the time of the vote, several parties complained that the discussion and subsequent voting process was muddled and rushed.

Gaining the final ISO stamp of approval would help Microsoft win more public-sector contracts, as some government bodies are nervous about storing archives in a proprietary format.

The adoption of OOXML as an ISO standard will remain on hold until the appeals are resolved, which could take several months, ISO said.

Critics say OOXML is not fully translatable into other document formats, notably the open-source Open Document Format that is already recognized as an international standard.

ISO's secretary-general and the general secretary of the International Electrotechnical Commission are considering the appeals and will submit them to their respective management boards for consideration by the end of the month.

The boards will then decide whether to proceed with the appeals process.

#### New Version of OpenOffice.org Fixes Critical Bug

OpenOffice.org has issued a patch for a security vulnerability affecting several versions of its open-source office suite.

The latest version, 2.4.1, is available for download on the organization's Web site.

The vulnerability is a memory problem called a heap overflow, OpenOffice.org said in an advisory. It can be exploited if an attacker sends someone an OpenOffice.org document that can take advantage of the flaw, which would then allow the hacker "to execute arbitrary commands on the system with the privileges of the user running OpenOffice.org."

So far, no working exploit has been reported, the organization said. The

flaw affects version 2.0 through 2.4.

The upgrade also includes several other fixes and new features, which are listed at [OpenOffice.org](http://OpenOffice.org).

[OpenOffice.org](http://OpenOffice.org), which is supported in part by Sun Microsystems, competes with Microsoft's Office productivity suite. [OpenOffice.org](http://OpenOffice.org)'s next major release, 3.0, is scheduled for September.

### New Firefox Web Browser To Be Released Tuesday

A new version of the Firefox Web browser is scheduled for release Tuesday with improvements in security, speed and design.

Many of the enhancements in Firefox 3 involve bookmarks. The new version lets Web surfers add keywords, or tags, to sort bookmarks by topic. A new "Places" feature lets users quickly access sites they recently bookmarked or tagged and pages they visit frequently but haven't bookmarked.

There's also a new star button for easily adding sites to your bookmark list - similar to what's already available on Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer 7 browser.

Other new features include the ability to resume downloads midway if the connection is interrupted and an updated password manager that doesn't disrupt the log-in process.

In a nod to the growing use of Web-based e-mail, the browser can be set to launch Yahoo Inc.'s service when clicking a "mailto" link in a Web page, the ones you might come across clicking on a name or a "contact us" link. Previously such links could only open a standalone, desktop e-mail program.

Yahoo is the only Web service initially supported. To use rivals like Google Inc.'s Gmail and Microsoft Corp.'s Hotmail, developers of those services will have to enable that capability first.

Firefox also will start blocking rather than simply warning about sites known to engage in "phishing" scams that try to trick users into revealing passwords and other sensitive information. The new version adds protection from sites known to distribute viruses and other malicious software.

The list of suspicious sites come from Google Inc. and StopBadware.org, a project headed by legal scholars at Harvard and Oxford universities.

Security researchers who need access to problem sites can manually turn the feature off.

Firefox 3 also offers speed and design improvements - the back button is now larger than the forward button, for instance, because people tend to return to a previous page more often, said Mike Schroepfer, the project's vice president of engineering.

Firefox is the No. 2 Web browser behind Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer. It comes from Mozilla, an open-source community in which

thousands of people, mostly volunteers, collectively develop free products.

Mozilla has been developing Firefox 3 for nearly three years and has been publicly testing it since November for Windows, Mac and Linux computers.

Its supporters are organizing launch parties around the world next week, and Mozilla is trying to set a world record for most software downloads in a 24-hour period.

Microsoft is currently testing Internet Explorer 8, while Opera Software ASA released Opera 9.5 on Thursday.

#### Energy Dept. Says New Computer World's Fastest

A computer designed to run virtual tests of U.S. nuclear weapons will be the world's fastest, making 1,000 trillion calculations per second, the U.S. Department of Energy said on Monday.

The IBM Roadrunner supercomputer at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico is the first to achieve a what is known as a petaflop of sustained performance, the department and IBM said.

"Flop" is an acronym meaning floating-point operations per second. One petaflop is 1,000 trillion computer calculations per second.

"Roadrunner will be used by the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration to perform calculations that vastly improve the ability to certify that the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile is reliable without conducting underground nuclear tests," the department said in a statement.

"Roadrunner will not only play a key role in maintaining the U.S. nuclear deterrent, it will also contribute to solving our global energy challenges, and open new windows of knowledge in the basic scientific research fields," it added.

"To put this into perspective, if each of the 6 billion people on earth had a hand calculator and worked together on a calculation 24 hours per day, 365 days a year, it would take 46 years to do what Roadrunner would do in one day," the department said.

#### Amazon Site Stumbles Again Monday

Online shoppers struggled to enter Amazon.com's main e-commerce site on Monday, after it had experienced similar problems on Friday.

Between 10:03 a.m. and 10:23 a.m. U.S. Pacific Time, only about 30 percent of visitors managed to enter Amazon.com, according to mobile and Internet management firm Keynote Systems, which tracks Web site performance.

After stabilizing, Amazon.com again wobbled, and its availability

dropped to about 68 percent between 10:56 a.m. and 11:09 a.m., said Shawn White, Keynote's director of external operations.

After that, the site went back to normal and remains that way at press time.

However, the technical gremlins also hit the company's U.K. storefront on Monday, and the problems there are ongoing.

The U.K. site first experienced problems at 10:06 a.m. PT, and its availability dropped as low as 38 percent - meaning that about six of 10 people couldn't enter - but by 12:11 p.m. the availability had climbed back to about 96 percent, White said.

Asked for comment, Amazon provided this statement via e-mail: "Some customers reported intermittent problems accessing Amazon retail Web sites on Monday morning. However, we are working to resolve the issues, and Amazon's web services are not affected."

Even people who managed to enter and browse the sites faced slow performance: While Amazon.com pages typically load in six seconds or less, that average climbed to about 15 seconds during the affected periods, White said.

Gomez, another Web site monitoring firm, puts Amazon's normal average response times between 3 seconds and 8.5 seconds, but that average rose to 14 seconds on Friday and stood in a range of between 2.5 seconds and 14 seconds on Monday.

On Friday, when the availability problems lasted about 3 hours, as well as on Monday, most shoppers having access problems were getting a cryptic error message saying "Http/1.1 Service Unavailable," which means nothing to nontechnical people.

This indicates to White that whatever caused the problem proved hard to isolate, making it impossible for the company to configure its system to trigger a more intelligible alert acknowledging the problem in plain English.

White's guess is that a misconfiguration somewhere in Amazon's complex e-commerce system discombobulated unrelated pieces in its vast network of databases, data centers and application and Web servers.

If this is indeed the cause of the problems, the lesson for Amazon and anyone else is to perform rigorous testing before making any alterations, especially when the change will have an effect on many moving parts in the system, White said.

"The more complex a system is, the more challenging it is to maintain, and a configuration problem here can cause problems somewhere else," he said.

White confirmed Amazon's statement that the company's Amazon Web Services hosted technology services weren't affected by the problems on Friday and Monday.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev called for Russia to be assigned an Internet domain name in the Cyrillic script on Wednesday as part of a Kremlin drive to promote Russian as a global language.

The Kremlin is concerned that Russian, once the main language throughout the Soviet Union, is losing ground to local languages and to the creeping influence of English. It sees defending Russian as a matter of national pride.

He said 300 million people worldwide used Russian media and that a Cyrillic domain name would be a key part of raising the importance of Russian as a language, a task he said was his personal priority as president.

"We must do everything we can to make sure that we achieve in the future a Cyrillic Internet domain name - it is a pretty serious thing," Medvedev told the International Congress of Russian Press in Moscow.

"It is a symbol of the importance of the Russian language and Cyrillic and it is not a bad sphere of cooperation. And I think we have a rather high chance of achieving such a decision in the Internet world."

Medvedev has been keen to portray himself as an Internet-savvy head of state: he has publicly used his mobile telephone to connect to the Internet and says he surfs online every morning for news.

Russian Internet sites use domain names in the Latin script, as in most parts of the Internet. Addresses end either with the suffix .ru, or in some cases .su, a domain name inherited from the Soviet Union.

Industry experts say Russia wants its domain name to be .rf - for Russian Federation - but written in the Cyrillic script.

Some in the industry have though raised concerns that it could allow the state to control more of the content in a sphere that has remained a relatively free forum for dissent at a time when traditional media have become subject to tighter control.

Russian is one of the United Nations' six main languages and the sixth most widely spoken languages in the world after Mandarin, English, Hindi/Urdu, Arabic and Spanish.

#### Salaries Are No Secret at New Site

Glassdoor.com, which went live last night, allows anyone to peer into details many employers would no doubt rather keep secret: salary information, CEO ratings from employees, and dishing about work environment, among other things.

The site shows teaser details for Microsoft, Yahoo, Cisco and Google for non-registered viewers, but to see all the data that others have shared, you'll need to first provide anonymous details on your own employment. Share your salary and see those from others. Same for employer reviews. You won't need to provide your name (though you will need to give it an e-mail address), and it's free.

Glassdoor says it's focusing on SF Bay area companies at the start, but is expanding to other regions and industries. As with any ratings system, I wouldn't put much stock in ratings for companies that are only based on a few people's reviews. It's too easy for one overly happy or disgruntled person to skew a rating.

But as an article in the San Francisco Chronicle describes, even a few scathing reviews could prove useful for an on-the-ball company to see if there's a problem manager or situation. I could certainly see people being more willing to vent on an anonymous site than to walk into their company's HR. Companies might not like to see such information made public, but they could still turn it to their advantage.

Also, while other sites such as Salary.com provide data on how much a given type of job might pay, Glassdoor.com could provide more specific comparisons, such as how much the other people in your particular company with your same job title are making. If those people happen to enter their data on the site, that is.

The site is sluggish right now and I'd guess it might be under a heavy load. For more background on Glassdoor, head to the SF Chron story.

#### Even With \$4 Gas, Demand for Telework Unmet

Even as gas prices hit historic highs in the U.S., most residents can't telecommute, according to a new survey released by advocacy group Telework Exchange.

Nearly all of the respondents in a recent survey by Telework Exchange expressed an interest in telecommuting and 92 percent said they believed their jobs could be done from home. But only 39 percent of the respondents, culled from 377 registrants of the Telework Exchange Web site, said they were able to telework at least part time.

"Telework Exchange registrants (both government and private-sector employees) do have a clear interest in telework," Cindy Auten, Telework Exchange's general manager, said in an e-mail. "We find that this is an accurate sample of the full population."

Even with people in much of the U.S. paying \$4 a gallon or more for gas, telecommuting seems to be facing an uphill battle. Telework Exchange has pushed for more telework options for U.S. government workers, but a survey released in March by CDW-G found only 17 percent of federal employees telecommuting.

Surveys have shown that management resistance to telework remains a barrier, Auten said. "What we found was that as managers become exposed to/involved in telework, their approval of the operating practice improves significantly," she added. "Encouraging managers to telework is a critical step to achieving overall agency telework adoption. Further, agencies must educate and train management on telework drivers and benefits."

Thirty-eight percent of the survey's respondents said they they're willing to pay any amount for gas. More than eight in 10 respondents said they rely on their vehicles to get to work, with only 13 percent

using car pooling and 10 percent using public transportation.

However, 78 percent of survey respondents said they were making lifestyle changes because of high gas prices. More than seven in 10 said they were limiting car trips or consolidating errands. Another 62 percent said they were spending less in general on other things and 53 percent said they were eating out less often.

An average U.S. resident spends \$2,052 a year for gas to commute, and spends 264 hours on the road, according to the survey.

"I think that we are seeing a tipping point for people to start looking for other alternatives to commuting," Auten said.

A law passed by Congress in 2000 requires federal agencies to create plans where eligible employees "may participate in telecommuting to the maximum extent possible without diminished employee performance."

Telework supporters say that such plans would have several benefits. It would keep more drivers off clogged roads in the Washington, D.C., area, and it would decrease air pollution, supporters say.

Asked how employees can convince their managers to allow telecommuting, Auten offered several suggestions.

Workers can point to online tools, including Telework Exchange's Online Eligibility Gizmo and its Telework Value Calculators, she said. The gizmo is a quiz that helps workers determine their eligibility to telecommute and the calculators show the costs of regular commuting.

"Telework Exchange recommends using the calculators and printing out the findings to present a business case for telework to management," Auten said.

Employees may also have to prove to managers that they can remain productive, she added. "It is also important that employees focus on measurable outcomes to demonstrate continued or increased productivity," she said. "It is also helpful to use project schedules, key milestones, regular status reports, and team reviews."

#### Internet Companies To Block Child Porn Sites

Verizon , Sprint and Time Warner Cable have agreed to block Internet bulletin boards and websites nationwide that disseminate child pornography, New York's attorney general announced on Tuesday.

The ISPs also agreed with New York Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to contribute more than \$1.1 million to help the state combat the spread of child pornography. The news was first reported in the New York Times late on Monday.

The companies have agreed to block access to newsgroups that traffic such images on one of the oldest online outposts, known as Usenet, as well as sites that host child pornography.

The agreements will affect customers not just in New York but throughout the country.

"The pervasiveness of child pornography on the Internet is horrific and it needs to be stopped," Cuomo said in a statement. "We are attacking this problem by working with Internet Service Providers to ensure they do not play host to this immoral business."

His office said its undercover investigation uncovered a major source of online child pornography known as "Newsgroups" - an online service not associated with websites.

Users can use Newsgroups as online bulletin boards where users can upload and download illicit files. The investigation uncovered 88 different Newsgroups that contained a total of 11,390 sexually lewd photos featuring prepubescent children.

After ISPs initially ignored the investigators' complaints, the attorney general's office threatened charges of fraud and deceptive business practices and the companies agreed to cooperate and began weeks of negotiations.

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